

Legislation aims to move Election Day to the first weekend in November ***Legislation aims to move Election Day to the first weekend in November***

Washington, DC— On Wednesday, Sen. Herb Kohl (D-WI) and Rep. Steve Israel (D-NY) announced the introduction of the Weekend Voting Act in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. The legislation would move Election Day from the first Tuesday in November to the first full weekend in November. Kohl and Israel both sponsored the legislation in previous sessions of Congress.

“Holding elections on the first Tuesday of November makes it difficult, even impossible, for many Americans with work and family responsibilities to exercise their fundamental right to vote,” Kohl said. “Weekend voting would remove unnecessary obstacles to voting and ensure more fair, open, and credible elections for citizens to choose their representatives in government.”

“When Congress decided, in 1845, that we should vote on a Tuesday it made sense. It was the easiest day for farmers in our agrarian society to get to the polls. Times have changed, and Tuesday voting just doesn’t make sense anymore,” said Rep. Steve Israel. “Voting should be easy. It should be accessible. By moving Election Day from a single day in the middle of the work week to a full weekend, we are encouraging Americans to participate. Our democracy will be best served when our leaders are elected by as many Americans as possible.”

The Weekend Voting Act would mandate national polls to be open from 10 a.m. (Eastern Time) Saturday to 6 p.m. (ET) Sunday in the 48 contiguous states. Election officials would be permitted to close polls during the overnight hours if they determine it would be inefficient to keep them open.

"Despite the excitement of the 2008 campaign, all the early predictions of record voter turnout proved to be too optimistic," said Dr. Norman Ornstein, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, and co-founder of Why Tuesday?, a nonpartisan group seeking to increase voter participation. "Turnout was up, but barely higher than in 2004. At the same time, many voters found their experience at the polls marred by long lines at peak hours early in the morning before work or at the end of the day after work. During the campaign, President-Elect Obama talked about bringing our antiquated voting system into the modern age. The number one reason given by nonvoters in the U.S. Census for not casting a ballot is that they're too busy. This proposal to move Election Day from Tuesday, where it has been since 1845, to the weekend, is a giant step in the right direction."

The long-standing tradition of holding federal elections on the first Tuesday of November began with an act of Congress in 1845. Tuesday was selected for its comparative convenience because it was a designated “court day” and the day in which land-owners would typically be in town to conduct business. The tradition was based on the then-agrarian American society.

In today’s America, 60 percent of all households have two working adults. Since most polls are

open only 12 hours (from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.) voters only have one or two hours to vote. As seen in the 2008 and 2004 elections and primaries, long lines in many polling places kept voters waiting longer than one or two hours.

The Weekend Voting Act would also build on individual state efforts to increase voter participation by providing absentee ballots and early voting. Thirty-two states permit in-person early voting at election offices or at other approved satellite locations. Twenty-eight states allow registered voters no-excuse absentee voting by mail.